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In Exiles' War Against Sandinists, Florida Is H.Q.

By PHILIP TAUBMAN

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 6 — On a recent evening in Miami, half a dozen men, several in conservative business suits, assembled in a cluttered ground-floor office of the Interamerican Engineers and Constructors Corporation.

After exchanging greetings in Spanish, and chatting briefly about the latest news from Nicaragua, their native country, the men got down to business: plotting the overthrow of the left-wing Sandinist Government in Managua.

The men were leaders of a coalition of Latin American political and paramilitary groups based in southern Florida. The groups, which have indirectly received assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency, according to national security officials, are composed primarily of Nicaraguan exiles who fled their country when the Sandinists came to power in 1979. The C.I.A. aid has consisted of money and military equipment passed to the groups through intermediaries, including Argentina, the American officials said.

The leaders, who say they have more than 5,000 armed paramilitary troops inside Nicaragua and just across the border in Honduras, confidently assert that they will topple the Sandinist Government by the end of 1983.

News Conference Scheduled

In an effort to build support for their cause in the United States, and to counter reports that they are former supporters of the late Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the Nicaraguan leader ousted in 1979, coalition leaders recently lifted some of the secrecy surrounding their activities.

They have scheduled a news conference in Miami for Tuesday to discuss their goals and to announce that additional exile groups have agreed to join the coalition, which is called the Nicaraguan Democratic Front.

"We want to give democracy a chance in Nicaragua," Edgar Chamorro, one of the coalition's leaders, said in an interview recently. "We have been pictured as Somoza supporters who want to restore a right-wing dictatorship in Nicaragua. That is untrue. We want a democratic process that will lead to free elections."

Mr. Chamorro, who left Managua in 1979 and now works as a stockbroker in Miami, acknowledged that paramilitary forces associated with the front include former officers in the Nicaraguan National Guard, which was closely identified with General Somoza. But he denied that the former guardsmen were enthusiastic Somoza followers.

Groups Formed in 1980

"We have tried to work with young, professional officers who were not associated with the excesses of the national guard," Mr. Chamorro said. "It is impossible to organize a military force without some former members of the guard."

The paramilitary units controlled by the front were called the September 15th Legion when they were first formed by former national guard officers in 1980.

The Democratic Front was created last year in an effort to widen the base of support and establish a central exile organization to coordinate anti-Sandinist activities, according to coalition leaders.

But some exile leaders, most prominently Edén Pastora Gómez, a former Sandinist leader who left Nicaragua last year, have refused to join the front because of its identification with the national guard.

The paramilitary units, which until recently were based primarily in Honduras, received assistance from Argentine military advisers when they began training in 1980, front leaders said.

Aid Is Called Insufficient

This year the groups began to receive aid through intermediaries from the C.I.A., according to American intelligence officials.

The front leaders in Miami, however, complained that the United States has not provided sufficient assistance. "We don't see any American aid for our political organization here in Miami," said Octavio Sacasa, a television producer.

"In America," he added, "the C.I.A. has a bad name. The ugly American is the C.I.A. agent. I cannot say whether we are getting help from the C.I.A., but I can tell you that the C.I.A. has no stigma. We cannot understand why people in this country find it wrong if the Government tries to help support pro-American groups overseas."

Junta Sets Policy

The coalition's day-to-day operations in Miami are directed by an executive committee, currently composed of seven exile leaders, including Mr. Chamorro and Mr. Sacasa. Other members include Aristides Sánchez, who was a

farmer in Nicaragua, J. David Zamora, a lawyer in Managua who now works as an insurance salesman, and Enrique A. Pereira, who owned the largest private construction company in Nicaragua before he fled in 1979. Mr. Pereira now owns the Interamerican Engineers and Constructors Corporation.

The executive committee, which meets regularly at the homes and offices of members in the Miami area, oversees fund raising and public relations in the United States.

Overall political and military policy for the coalition is set by a political junta, which includes five military and eight civilian exile leaders from Miami, Houston, Costa Rica and Honduras, according to Mr. Sacasa.

He said the coalition's base of operations in Central America is Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital. Leaders shuttle between Tegucigalpa and Miami for strategy meetings.

A series of high-level meetings in Miami last month coincided with a junior welterweight boxing match between Aaron Pryor, an American, and Alexis Argüello, a Nicaraguan. Many exile leaders remained in Miami to discuss military tactics after the championship bout, which was won by the American.

Leaders of the front reported that paramilitary operations have entered a new phase in recent months as armed units have moved into Nicaragua from training camps in Honduras.

Mr. Pereira, who was educated in American schools, said: "We are much stronger now, much better organized. We feel sure that the Nicaraguan people will rebel against the Sandinists and the Nicaraguan Army will turn against the Government."

Because its armed forces are outnumbered by the Nicaraguan military, the coalition, leaders said, is seeking to ignite an internal uprising by operating as a guerrilla force inside Nicaragua, attacking military and industrial targets in hit-and-run raids.

The coalition also operates several clandestine radio stations in Honduras and Costa Rica that beam anti-Sandinist propaganda into Nicaragua.